



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee discusses  
future Navajo Head Start employee lay-offs, re-assignments, and new hires**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from the Navajo Head Start Agency, regarding the projected lay-offs, employee re-assignments, and their struggles to hire qualified employees due to the lack of candidates with federally mandated credentials.

In August 2008, the National Head Start Office notified the Navajo Head Start Agency that teachers, teacher aides, and assistants must possess specified credentials, and requiring that at least 50-percent of head start teachers have at least a bachelors degree in early childhood education, by Sept. 30 of this year.

"These lay-offs are due to the National Head Start regulations, which require employees to acquire certain credentials by the given deadlines," said HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels). "These regulations are written in the Head Start grant we accepted. We must comply with the agreement."

In Oct. 2011, each Head Start classroom teacher was required to have at least an associates degree in early childhood education. Since then, Head Start credentials have increased in order to build a more qualified workforce.

Navajo Head Start assistant superintendent Sharon H. Singer, addressed the committee to clarify the agency's actions.

"In order to be in compliance with federal requirements, the Navajo Head Start Agency is proactively working to build a highly-qualified workforce," said Singer. "Head Start pays 100-percent of the training and tuition necessary for employees to obtain the required credentials like a bachelors degree or child development associate."

In May 2012, the Navajo Head Start Office commenced a three-year restructuring process to address specific issues of non-compliance with the federal Head Start Act.

In response to the report, HEHSC member Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) stated that the report clearly explained why the projected lay-offs are necessary.

“We cannot put our Head Start program in jeopardy,” said Delegate Butler. “Unfortunately it has come to this, but it is clear that the staff were well informed of what was expected of them in order to maintain this program for our Navajo children.”

EHSC members Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) and Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) requested details about the number of employees expected to be laid off and employee salary.

In response, Singer said 24 teaching positions would soon be vacant and that all employees will continue to be properly compensated for their work time leading up to Sept. 30.

“I appreciate this report from Navajo Head Start. With the September 30 deadline soon approaching, it is clear we understand the requirements set forth by the National Head Start Office,” said Delegate Butler.

The EHSC accepted the report with a vote of 4-0.

Following the report, Delegate Hale suggested that Head Start also provide a thorough report to the Naabik’íyáti’ Committee for all delegates to have a clear understanding of changes soon to occur in their local Head Start centers.

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